

Creating new products, jobs from the ground up



Michael Clancy/Rockford Register Star

Belvidere Mayor Fred Brereton (left) convenes a news conference Monday in Belvidere announcing \$500,000 in federal funds, secured by Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan (second from left), for a Belvidere/Boone County high-tech research facility.

Ag tech park gets startup money

The complex will be built in Boone County.

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Rock River Valley business and government leaders crowded the offices Monday of the Belvidere Chamber of Commerce to hear U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo tell them of a \$500,000 federal grant to help

launch an agricultural technology research park in Boone County.

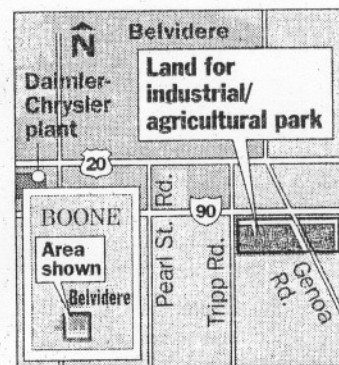
The startup money puts the project on track nearly four years after plans were first announced.

The objective is to create a regional hub for development of new grain products by biotechnology firms. For example, a company might come up with a soybean-based fuel

for use in cars made at the nearby DaimlerChrysler plant.

The complex will be built, mostly with private-sector funding, on a 700-acre site south of Interstate 90 at Tripp and Genoa roads.

The business and engineering departments of Northern Illinois University will be involved in developing the project. **Please see 1C**



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Boone County gets ag tech park grant

The \$500,000 committed is part of the \$397.4 billion spending package approved by Congress.

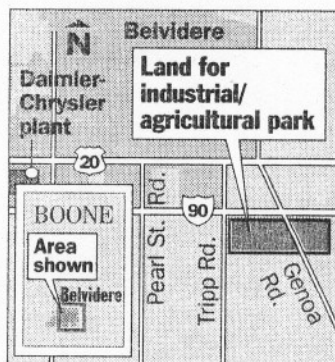
By **ROBERT BAXTER**
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BELVIDERE — Boone County is preparing to enter a golden age of tech development with the announcement of \$500,000 in federal funding for an agriculture technology research park.

The money will pay for staffing and operations and to help prospective tenants create plans to get their products from research stage to market.

U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan, led a group of officials who packed the Belvidere Chamber of Commerce offices Monday to laud the project's potential on land south of Interstate 90 at Tripp and Genoa roads.

Manzullo said the federal money will be a boost to the region's economy, which traditionally has been hit harder than most during downturns. Long term, the marriage of agriculture and technology



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promises new uses for agricultural products that would create jobs.

"Why not take products grown in this area and create new uses for those products?" Manzullo said.

Northern Illinois University's business and engineering departments will play a key role in development of the ag tech park, NIU President John G. Peters said. Students also will benefit from their involvement in the project.

In 1999, officials announced plans to transform 700 acres of farmland into an agricultural research and development campus.

Belvidere Mayor Fred Brereton first approached Manzullo with a vision that lacked specifics but could help preserve the area's farming

heritage and create new uses for crops in Illinois.

For example, Daimler-Chrysler, which operates an assembly plant in Belvidere, has developed the automobile underside made of flax fiber and seed.

Belvidere has talked with a company that creates a wood product from sunflower husks, newspapers and soybeans.

Growth Dimensions executive director Mark Williams said Belvidere is negotiating with at least one company, but he would not elaborate on those negotiations.

Money earmarked for Belvidere's ag tech park is part of a \$397.4 billion spending package approved by Congress that also includes \$200,000 to study extending commuter train service from Chicago to the Rock River Valley and \$1.75 million in improvements to Greater Rockford Airport.

Bryan Davis, Manzullo's deputy chief of staff, said the funding should be available very soon because it is part of the 2003 budget, which began four months ago.

Officials plan to seek more funding for the ag tech park in the 2004 budget.

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